United Nations E/CN.6/2014/L.6

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
27 March 2014

Original: English

**Commission on the Status of Women**
**Fifty-eighth session**
10-21 March 2014
Agenda item 3 (a) (i)
**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": Implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: priority theme: challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls**

# Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls

## Moderator's summary

1. On 12 March 2014, the Commission on the Status of Women held a panel discussion on the priority theme of the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, "Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls". The Vice-Chair of the Commission, Christine Löw, moderated the discussion. The panellists were: the Senior Policy Adviser, Ipas Malawi, Chrispine Gwalawala Sibande; the Chair, Global Water Partnership, Ursula Schäfer-Preuss; the Executive Director, Center for Women's Global Leadership, Rutgers University, Radhika Balakrishnan; member and Rapporteur, Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Virginia Gomes; and the Director, Social Protection Department, International Labour Organization, Isabel Ortiz. Representatives of Member States, regional groups and civil society contributed to the discussion.

2. Participants in the interactive expert panel identified a number of achievements, challenges and gaps in implementing the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls and highlighted their perspective on priorities for consideration in the post-2015 development agenda. The discussion highlighted examples of good practices, lessons learned and the challenges in meeting the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls.

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**Progress and challenges in achieving the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls**

3. Many participants noted that progress had been made in achieving some of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls, especially in terms of the targets for universal access to primary education. Those achievements had been reached as a result of efforts such as making primary education free for all children. Participants also noted that progress had been made in areas not monitored by the Millennium Development Goals, for example, through the adoption of laws and policies that contributed to gender equality, women's empowerment and the human rights of women and girls, such as laws on women's sexual and reproductive health, on equality between women and men, on child marriage and on ending violence against women.

4. Significant gaps and challenges remained, however. The pace of progress towards achievement of many targets for women and girls remained unacceptably slow. Participants expressed concern that many of the goals that had not been achieved were the goals most relevant to gender equality and women's empowerment. Participants also highlighted that progress on the Millennium Development Goals had been slow owing to the lack of coherence between the targets of the Goals and international human rights standards. For example, some participants noted the serious challenges in reaching the goal related to maternal mortality because of the absence of a comprehensive approach to sexual and reproductive health and rights. Other participants highlighted that, while they had achieved some targets, that progress had not translated into gender equality in other areas and had not shifted structural gender inequalities.

5. One of the key challenges raised in the discussion related to the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that women faced. Lack of attention to such multiple discrimination had contributed to stark gaps in achievement of the Millennium Development Goals for the most marginalized groups of women and girls. Such discrimination against women included the particular experiences of indigenous women, rural women, older women and girls, women with disabilities, and women from sexual minorities. Participants noted that while those women were often the hardest to reach through policy and programme interventions, they also had a key role to play in development through their crucial contributions to economic, political and social life.

6. Many participants acknowledged that pervasive gender inequality was related to the lack of attention within the Millennium Development Goal framework to underlying contexts of discrimination in society, as well as structural economic, political and social constraints. That encompassed the lack of implementation or enforcement of laws, discriminatory social norms, and pervasive gender stereotypes. Participants noted that that lack of attention to structural causes might be because the choice of Millennium Development Goal indicators had led to narrow policy approaches.

**A human rights-based approach to development**

7. Many participants agreed that a human rights perspective was necessary, both for the acceleration of the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls and for framing the post-2015 development agenda. Attention to women's human rights should be informed by and grounded in existing international

agreements, such as the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Despite the existence of international declarations, goals and targets, inclusive development could not be realized if countries faced a lack of political will to address gender equality and women's empowerment issues. Men and women needed to work together for the realization of those goals by formulating and implementing development and economic policies that transformed women's lives.

8. Participants emphasized that human rights standards and principles should underpin monitoring and accountability for gender equality and women's human rights. The Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights set out the immediate obligation of non-discrimination and equality in the realization of economic, social and cultural rights that were particularly relevant for the Millennium Development Goals. Indicators of the post-2015 development agenda should align with the realization of those rights. That included the need for a consistent approach to the participation of rights holders in all aspects of decision-making and the accountability of duty bearers. Human rights principles such as the use of maximum available resources and non-retrogression should also guide policymaking.

9. It was suggested that, while human rights had become a global normative framework, it was necessary to embed a culture of human rights at all levels to achieve transformational change in the lives of women and girls, whether international, regional, national or local. Policymakers should incorporate the principles of human rights into all of their work. Key to developing that culture of human rights was the implementation of existing legal and policy institutions. The laws to protect women's human rights and the policies that contributed to gender equality must be comprehensively implemented at all levels.

**Resource allocation, gender-responsive budgeting and social protection**

10. Macroeconomic policies, including monetary and financial sector regulations, set the broad parameters within which resources could be mobilized for public social expenditure. In order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and to ensure that States were accountable for their commitments to those Goals, it was important to focus on the tracking of budgets and the availability and distribution of resources for gender equality. Gender responsive budgeting was raised as an important tool that could be implemented by all countries to ensure that resources were committed to the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls.

11. It was necessary to look not only at how budgets were allocated but also how resources were mobilized, by assessing taxation policies, trade policies and fiscal policies. Governments should be held accountable for the management of resources to ensure that dedicated resources and budgets were being effectively spent. Often the failure to address economic, social and cultural rights of women was not necessarily a result of a lack of resources, but instead a lack of prioritization and proper distribution of resources. In addition to considering the allocation of existing resources, it was important to consider resource generation and the possibility of changes in the policies that generated resources.

12. Although the provision of a social protection floor was an essential tool to fight poverty and promote inclusive development, the fulfilment of economic and social rights was often not realized and not given sufficient priority by policymakers.

At the same time, several participants noted that social protection had been a key strategy in many countries for meeting Millennium Development Goal targets. Numerous country experiences provided examples of good practices in promoting social protection, such as maternity benefits, as well as universal access to essential services, such as health care and education. Lessons learned could be shared among countries and with the international community to promote future development strategies that addressed the delivery of inclusive social protection services.

13. The macroeconomic context had a significant impact on fiscal policies. The immediate response to the 2008 crisis by many countries was to put in place new social protection measures or to strengthen already existing ones in order to protect the population from the economic and social fallouts of the crisis, including mass unemployment and precariousness of jobs. Since 2010, however, the trend had been reversed, with austerity measures taking hold in various regions. Cuts in social spending as a result of austerity measures often translated into a reduction in opportunities for vulnerable populations as well as a shift in the burden of caring from the paid to the unpaid economy disproportionately assumed by women and girls.

14. The investment in social protection infrastructure had long-term effects on stabilizing a society and on contributing to its development. Participants suggested that in times of crisis in particular, social protection measures should be strengthened rather than reduced, in order to guard vulnerable population groups from its most adverse effects. Realization of the right to social security needed to be enforced for all, especially women, who often shouldered both paid and unpaid work in sustaining their households. Similarly, women's participation in decision-making at all levels was essential to ensure that social protection addressed gender-specific needs.

**Lack of sex-disaggregated data and a focus on data collection**

15. Gender statistics were essential to inform policy formulation and to hold actors accountable for results with respect to gender equality and women's empowerment. Significant efforts had been made towards the formulation of measurement frameworks, including goals, targets and indicators for monitoring progress. Participants called for a focus on the compilation of sex-disaggregated data and the production of gender statistics, to inform proper planning based on adequate gender analysis.

16. Baselines were also necessary to set up specific targets in the context of a post-2015 development framework. Therefore, participants suggested that national statisticians should work with the international statistical community to promote the collection of sex-disaggregated and gender relevant data that was internationally comparable and of quality. Civil society could also play a key role to advocate for evidence-based decision-making in the context of inclusive policy formulation and financial allocations.

**Women in crisis and conflict situations**

17. Participants noted that data was particularly scarce in countries suffering from conflict and natural disasters. Given their special needs, those countries faced significant challenges in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Therefore they might require targets that differed from the globally agreed benchmarks. Similarly, conflict and post-conflict countries might benefit from specific indicators on women, peace and security that better captured their realities and allowed for

context-specific policy formulation. Issues such as violence and women's participation in conflict resolution should be included in future development frameworks and national development strategies for that specific group of countries. The collection of gender statistics in that context was extremely relevant and could serve as an advocacy tool for social protection even in situations of instability when national resources were limited.

18. The growing concentration of displaced people and victims of conflict also required further analysis. For example, displaced women and girls were significantly more vulnerable to violence and were often denied the right to participate in decision-making, to legal assistance and to gain access to quality reproductive health services and education. All those issues needed to be taken into account and, despite their context-specific nature, should be included in the post-2015 development agenda.

**A stand-alone goal on gender equality and gender mainstreaming**

19. Participants expressed wide support for a stand-alone goal on gender equality in the post-2015 development agenda as a necessary component to ensure sustainable development. A new goal on gender equality should address the shortcomings of the Millennium Development Goal framework, including the failure to address violence against women, women's sexual and reproductive health, women's access to assets, women in conflict and post-conflict zones, and women's paid and unpaid work. Some participants noted that while goals and targets should be tailored to the national context, a stand-alone goal should address the underlying forms of discrimination and inequality that women experienced.

20. In addition to a stand-alone goal on gender equality, most participants in the discussion agreed that gender mainstreaming throughout the post-2015 development agenda was a key priority. Gender equality considerations should be included in each indicator for each goal. That would promote the systemic incorporation of gender perspectives across the post-2015 agenda. Further work should be undertaken to mainstream gender perspectives throughout the Millennium Development Goal framework to ensure that gender equality considerations were addressed in each goal and target.

United Nations E/CN.6/2014/INF/7

# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: Limited
25 April 2014

Original: English

**Commission on the Status of Women**
**Fifty-eighth session**
10-21 March 2014
Agenda item 3 (a) (ii)
**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives; review theme: access and participation of women and girls in education, training and science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work**

## Women's and girls' equal access to and participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics education

### Moderator's summary

1. On 18 March 2014, the Commission on the Status of Women held an interactive dialogue to review progress in implementing the agreed conclusions on access and participation of women and girls in education, training and science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work, adopted by the Commission at its fifty-fifth session in 2011 (see E/2011/27-E/CN.6/2011/12).

2. In the agreed conclusions, the Commission adopted a set of recommendations for action in six key areas: (a) strengthening national legislation, policies and programmes; (b) expanding women's and girls' access to and participation in education; (c) strengthening gender-sensitive quality education and training, including in the field of science and technology; (d) supporting the transition from education to full employment and decent work; (e) increasing retention and progression of women in science and technology employment; and (f) making science and technology responsive to women's needs.

3. The interactive dialogue was organized in the form of two panel discussions held on 18 March 2014. The first panel discussion, held in the morning, focused on areas (a) to (c) and specifically on women's and girls' equal access to and participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics education. The



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second panel, held in the afternoon, focused on areas (d) to (f) and specifically on women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics employment and on making science and technology responsive to women's and girls' needs and priorities (see the Moderator's summary in E/CN.6/2014/INF/5).

4. The panel was moderated by the Vice-Chair of the Commission, Carlos Garcia Gonzalez (El Salvador). The panellists were: Gloria Bonder, Director of the Gender, Society and Policies Area of the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences, Argentina; Njideka Harry, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Youth for Technology Foundation, Nigeria; Leigh Ann DeLyser, Academy for Software Engineering and Girls Who Code, United States of America; and Luna Ruiz, student at the Academy for Software Engineering, United States. Saniye Gülser Corat, Director of the Division for Gender Equality of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), acted as discussant and summarized key points of the dialogue. An issues paper provided the framework for the discussion. Representatives of 20 Member States, the European Union and one non-governmental organization participated in the interactive dialogue.

5. Participants noted that significant progress had been made towards reaching gender parity in enrolment and retention in primary and secondary education. That progress was a result of the implementation and enforcement of universal and compulsory education in several countries, as well as investments into infrastructure, for example to provide separate sanitation facilities for girls and increased safety and security. A significant number of girls, however, were still dropping out of secondary school owing to factors such as early marriage, pregnancy and unpaid care responsibilities. According to the 2012 edition of the UNESCO *Education for All Global Monitoring Report*, half of the world's out-of-school children were living in sub-Saharan Africa and, if those trends continued, comprehensive gender parity in education would only be reached in 2089.

6. While opportunities for women and girls to gain access to education had increased, the issue of quality of education, while of equal importance, had not received corresponding attention or resources. As a result, there had been limited progress in improving the quality of education. Participants called for greater balance in investments made in education, with resources directed at ensuring both access to and quality of education. Improvements in quality would require an emphasis on more diverse teaching teams in terms of gender and skill sets, an enhanced learning environment and more gender-sensitive topics in the curricula of science, technology, engineering and mathematics-related subjects. Further, improved teacher education and learning opportunities were required, to foster gender equality and women's empowerment and to encourage greater retention of girl students.

7. While acknowledging the persistent challenges in the education system overall and their impact on women and girls in particular, participants agreed that the challenges were even more severe in fields related to science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Gender stereotypes and cultural norms and attitudes reinforced the belief that science, technology, engineering and mathematics were the exclusive domain of men and boys, and that women and girls were not qualified to engage in science and technology fields. Those stereotypes were perpetuated by teachers, family members, the community and society, and the media. To counter such dominant perceptions, an increasing number of initiatives had been carried out,

such as media and awareness-raising campaigns that portrayed women as builders, innovators and problem solvers rather than passive consumers of technology.

8. Participants pointed to the digital divide between developed and developing countries, as well as between women and men, emphasizing the potential of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to enable women and girls, in particular those living in remote and rural areas, to access knowledge. ICTs could enhance opportunities for participation in public life and access to education and information to build capacities. Digital tools could strengthen opportunities for entrepreneurship, including with regard to running businesses from the home. Participants also stressed that women's ability to gain access to technology and similar productive resources was critical to development. They shared information on successful initiatives aimed at building women's and girls' digital literacy and increasing their meaningful engagement with ICTs. Other good practices included equipping public schools with ICTs and ensuring that teachers were trained to effectively use technology as part of their teaching methods and curricula.

9. Gender-based discrimination in science, technology, engineering and mathematics education, as well as in the professional arena, had a direct impact on women's career choices. Consequently, women tended to opt for employment in the health care and other social service sectors over sectors such as engineering, physics, computer science and manufacturing. Science, technology, engineering and mathematics-related sectors, however, were growing fast and were characterized by rapidly increasing employment opportunities, higher wages and greater potential for socioeconomic mobility. In order for women to gain access to those sectors, they had to be encouraged to participate in the science and technology education that would qualify them to enter those professions.

10. Increased access by women and girls to science, technology, engineering and mathematics education required structural changes and fundamental shifts in the field that went beyond merely increasing the number of women and girls participating in science and technology. Existing science, technology, engineering and mathematics institutions and cultures needed to be examined and challenged, as did the decision-making role of women in those fields. Participants recommended that steps be taken to evaluate educational institutions, their management and funding, their methods of assessing competencies and their strategies for recruiting, retaining and promoting women teachers and managers. Participants shared good practices with regard to efforts to bring on board different stakeholders — from academia, the public and private sectors and non-governmental organizations — to build effective educational environments that responded to broader societal needs, including local content and knowledge and learning at the local and community levels. Initiatives to better understand and document young women's and girls' educational experience were mentioned, including how women and girls sought to make a difference in their communities by finding science and technology-based solutions to day-to-day challenges. Such efforts had been successful in drawing women and girls to science, technology, engineering and mathematics-related fields.

11. Bringing about a structural shift in science, technology, engineering and mathematics education required a focus on the content of the education, as well as on teaching methods and the integration of science, technology, engineering and mathematics into other disciplines, such as the arts, law, business and social sciences. Such an approach could raise women's and girls' interest in science and

technology, and better respond to their specific needs. For instance, efforts had been made to promote the number of scientific studies focusing on gender equality issues.

12. Participants highlighted a number of concrete initiatives that could be replicated and scaled up to increase women's and girls' access to and participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics education. They included the promotion of female role models in such education and employment, to break down gender stereotypes; the establishment of scholarships for girls who wanted to pursue science, technology, engineering and mathematics education; the creation of girls-only learning programmes and summer camps in science and technology; the establishment of support networks and mentoring programmes to create an enabling and supportive environment for women and girls to engage in science and technology; and enhanced involvement of and communication between teachers, parents and other family members. Moreover, targeted efforts had been made to promote women's scientific careers, in particular as researchers in academia.

13. Women's and girls' access to and participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics education was seen as important for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, in particular since education was known to be an entry point to other opportunities and benefits in the economy, community and society. In order to better promote the issue and support national policy decisions around opportunities for women and girls in science and education, comprehensive and comparable sex-disaggregated data were needed throughout the science, technology, engineering and mathematics value chain — from education and training to employment and leadership in these sectors. This would also help better monitor progress and evaluate the effectiveness of various initiatives aimed at bringing about change for women and girls.

14. Participants called for a global mapping of policies and initiatives to enhance women's and girls' access to and participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics education. Such information would contribute to understanding better the issues to be covered in the post-2015 development agenda.